

SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

**WATER RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMISSION
SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT
LAKE OKEECHOBEE COMMITTEE MEETING**

**January 25, 2006, 9:00 a.m.
Harborside Event Center
1375 Monroe Street, Ft. Myers, FL**

Attending – Committee Members

Susan Brookman	Beverly Grady	Bob Pace (for Barry Rosen)
Alice Carlson	Paul Gray	Judy Sanchez
Joe Collins	Kevin Henderson	Ray Scott
Joan Davis	James Lavender	Craig Tepper
Richard Earp	David Lithgow	Jody Thomas
Don Fox	Mary Ann Martin	Ken Todd
Lt. Col. Andrew Goetz (for Dennis Duke)	Barbara Miedema	Bubba Wade

Absent – Committee Members

Doug Bournique	Truman (Gene) Duncan	Kim Shugar
Bob Butler	David Hazellief	
Michael DiTerlizzi	Frank Marsocci	

Attending - WRAC Members:

Walter Carson	Harry Cronin	Patrick Hayes
Joan Davis		

Chair Alice Carlson called the meeting to order at 9:20 a.m.

Chair Carlson welcomed everyone to the meeting and participating in the work of the SFWMD Water Resources Advisory Commission Lake Okeechobee Committee. She provided information on the purpose of the Water Resources Advisory Commission (WRAC) Lake Okeechobee Committee. The rules for the meeting today were explained to the attendees.

2. Member Issues

Ray Scott – Regional PDT and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) dry run last week. He spoke of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project. He urged the committee members to take advantage of these types of meetings. He provided information on the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project and reported that ten alternatives have been developed. The team has focused on three alternatives. He expressed his concerns on one of the projects and said alternatives have been taken off the table. We need to look at projects overall and where money can be spent more cost effectively.

Another issue – The House Appropriations Sub-Committee and the lands for restoration. He provided information on escalating land costs, and projects that can help accomplish some of the goals in the Lake Okeechobee Watershed. There is no funding strategy at this time and he urged the Committee members to provide input to the members of the legislature.

Wastewater residuals were discussed. There are technologies available for using residuals of wastewater and he provided information on some of those technologies.

Comments are due on February 3 on the Watershed project and he requested this be an item on the WRAC agenda for February 2, 2006.

Bubba Wade, Vice-Chair of the WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee, provided input on the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project and this important matter will be addressed at a future WRAC meeting.

Announcement:

Chair Carlson introduced public officials attending the meeting and asked them to speak to the group. City of Ft. Myers Mayor Jim Humphrey; Lee County Commissioner and Chair, Tammy Hall; Ralph Woodring of Sanibel, Florida; Erick Lindblad, Executive Director, Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation.

Mayor Jim Humphrey welcomed the Committee and members of the public to the meeting. The downtown area is being revitalized and he urged everyone to visit the area businesses. He commended the members of the Committee for volunteering their time and efforts to preserve the environment.

Commissioner Tammy Hall welcomed the Committee to Ft. Myers. This is a very challenging issue and is one of the top five priorities of the Lee County Commission. She applauded the Committee for their hard work and for the efforts in dealing with this very complicated issue.

Return to Member Comment:

Paul Gray – He provided information on the three final alternatives on the Lake Okeechobee Watershed project. He requested this information be brought to a future WRAC meeting. Phosphorus levels were discussed and he said phosphorus levels have changed greatly. He would like to have more information on how phosphorus levels can be reduced to help the estuaries. A lot of problems need to be addressed.

Beverly Grady - She urged members of the Committee and members of the public to view the Caloosahatchee River while in Fort Myers. The interconnectivity between Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River was reviewed. Consideration of additional storage in the EAA and shared adversity was discussed. The storage of water in the

EAA and the studies were mentioned. She has not been able to see the studies that were to be posted on the USACOE website. She requested the time to read all the past data.

Mary Ann Martin – She is the owner of Roland Martin Marina in Clewiston. The economic impact of a fishing tournament recently held in Clewiston was explained. Fish were in a specific area due to clarity in the water. A better fishery is her goal. She believes the problems in Lake Okeechobee are worse than the problems in the Caloosahatchee River. Lake Okeechobee is on its deathbed and is a mud hole. This is a very, very grave problem and she asked for any support that can be provided.

Jody Thomas – Expressed a sense of urgency and said we should act differently than we have in the past. Some of the challenges were originally laid out in the report on the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project. We need to get together and figure out a way to make improvements happen. She sees the additional need for integration and the need to send a firm message to Congress. The ability to manage the water, fire management, and other issues were discussed. The ability to store water is very important and urgent.

Susan Brookman – She provided information on the Minutes of the last meeting and she corrected a passage regarding what she said. She does think the WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee should take a strong role in the land planning for water management. She named several groups attending the meeting and thanked them for coming.

Jim Lavender – He provided information on the importance of concerns that have been expressed on the Lake and the River. High releases, future designs need to recognize the wet and dry seasons and the hits that will be taken by the Lake and estuaries.

Patrick Hayes (WRAC Member) - He spoke of the newspaper article that stated “We have stopped releases to the Lake” and estuaries that are receiving damage. They would benefit from a more constant flow and he suggested getting the Lake at a little bit lower level.

Lt. Col Andrew Goetz (for Dennis Duke) – He said the format for the USACOE website is on the correct path. The options for Lake Okeechobee and the Caloosahatchee River were discussed. Funding is not unlimited and that is a restraint to the USACOE. He will try to locate the requested information and provide to the Committee. He will lay out the plan for the spring releases.

Ken Todd – He spoke of a report he has given to Rick Smith that will be sent to the Committee members and can be discussed at the next meeting.

Joe Collins – He provided information on the funding and acknowledged that it is unlimited. The TMDL should not be discarded without seeing figures on the cost.

Chair Carlson provided information on the agenda format.

3. Lake Okeechobee Water Operations Update, by Calvin Neidrauer, Chief Consulting Engineer, Operations Control Dept., SFWMD.

Mr. Neidrauer presented information on this item. A copy of his presentation is available in the District Clerk's Office. The current water conditions for Lake Okeechobee and the Lee County area were reviewed. The stage and regulatory discharge history and projection for Lake Okeechobee were explained.

Mr. Wade provided information on Regulation Schedule from the USACOE. When and how regulatory discharges are done was explained to the attendees. This is required from the schedule. When proposed changes to the Regulatory Schedule are made, the purpose is to see if there is a way to get the Lake water level lower. Mr. Neidrauer said the information is available on the District's website.

Presentation continued with information on the Water Catchment Areas (WCAs). Information on the "Dry Season", and the "Position Analysis" was provided.

Kevin Henderson said he has seen several of these presentations and the explanation by SFWMD staff for the reasons for water releases that damage the estuaries. He provided information on rainfall and regulatory discharges in the past. He stated that almost four times as much water has been discharged since 1995. He asked for a presentation on the wet versus dry conditions and the problems must be dealt with as soon as possible.

David Lithgow, representing recreational users, asked about modeling on temporary deviations during the dry periods. Mr. Neidrauer said the SFWMD has done modeling on the January Position Analysis and scenarios on releases. The levels did shift down slightly and has dropped a little bit due to the temporary deviation. Mr. Lithgow asked about the vegetation on the Lake and Mr. Neidrauer provided information regarding pulse releases. The managed recession was discussed. Lt. Col. Goetz provided information on the regulatory schedule and deviations that will be done in the future.

Beverly Grady supported Mr. Henderson's request for a presentation on a proposed Schedule. Mr. Wade provided information on the wet season and obtaining additional evaluations. Lt. Colonel Andrew Goetz (of the Corps) provided information.

Barbara Miedema spoke on the variables in the current Regulation Schedule.

4. Lake Okeechobee Inflows/Outflows and Phosphorous Loads, by Calvin Neidrauer, Chief Consulting Engineer, Operations Control Dept., SFWMD.

Mr. Neidrauer presented information on this item. A copy of his presentation is available in the District Clerk's Office. Historical flows and phosphorus loads to and

from Lake Okeechobee were explained. The adaptive protocols have been passed along to the USACOE.

This Lake Okeechobee Committee set up a Technical Sub-Committee to study the annual flows to and from Lake Okeechobee and he provided information on their studies.

The presentation contained substantial information in several graphs and charts on the phosphorus concentration levels in areas in Lake Okeechobee. The next steps are to assemble similar graphics to show temporal and spatial details of flows and loads from Lake Okeechobee. A spreadsheet for information will be provided.

Roland Ottonlini asked for timelines on the different waterflows. Mr. Neidrauer said the information is available and needs to be assembled to be provided to the Committee.

Susan Brookman asked for clarification on water flows and Mr. Neidrauer provided the information.

5. Water Storage on Private Land, by Chip Merriam, Deputy Executive Director, Water Resources, SFWMD.

Mr. Merriam presented information this item and a copy of his presentation is available in the District Clerk's Office. Mr. Merriam provided background information on the issues that led to the development of discussions of water storage on private land. Information was given on previous studies of water storage in the Everglades Agriculture Area (EAA), water quantity issues, Lake Okeechobee wet season inflow, estimated total Regulatory Discharge from Lake Okeechobee, Everglades Issues, Everglades Agriculture Area, estimated costs, and flooding the STAs.

6. Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Restoration (LOER) Plan Update, by Chip Merriam, Deputy Executive Director.

Mr. Merriam presented information on this item. A copy of his presentation is available in the District Clerk's Office. Mr. Merriam provided background information on the inception and progress of the LOER plan. He addressed several questions that had been asked previously by Lake Okeechobee Committee members.

Topics covered included the Lake Okeechobee and Estuary recovery; LOER components and estuary recovery; fast-track projects; permanent forward pumps for water supply during droughts; revising the current Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule; SFWMD support to ongoing revisions to the Lake Okeechobee Operating Schedule; revisions to the ERP criteria; alternative storage and disposal of excess surface water; water storage assessments: study areas; deep well injection and aquifer storage and recovery; continued implementation of the Lake Okeechobee Protection Plan and the CERP Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project; set TMDLs for Lake Okeechobee tributaries – FDEP; mandatory fertilizers best management practices

and Florida Department of Agricultural and Consumer Services; innovative land use planning; elimination of land applications of residuals; a summary of estimated costs for 2006; Lake Okeechobee and Estuary Recovery; opportunities for local governmental participation; and other agency actions, i.e. implement modified water deliveries, removal of sediments and bank stabilization of the C-44, and retrofit S-308 and S-77 for mid or top water releases.

Mr. Merriam said a lot is going on and Senator Pruitt has provided substantial support. The SFWMD Governing Board is very involved in assisting with the plans.

Ray Scott asked about the revisions to the ERP criteria. Mr. Merriam provided answers. Language on the wastewater residuals was discussed.

Jody Thomas asked for the range of considerations for the changes. Mr. Merriam provided information.

Roland Ottoloni spoke of the relationships with private landowners and he urged continued efforts on the options. Mr. Merriam provided additional detail.

Don Fox asked for clarification on the removal of sediment and Mr. Merriam gave some information. Kim O'Dell will provide further information during her presentation later in the meeting.

Paul Gray asked that in the future the SFWMD keep in mind the need for land when the need for water storage is completed.

Walter Carson is the Chair of the WRAC Stormwater Management group and he provided information on developing best management practices, the cost advantages, working with developers and gaining beneficial use from the land, using smaller pockets of land for water storage, and the possibility of using land that is not only upstream of Lake Okeechobee. Land all around the Lake and the Caloosahatchee River should be utilized.

Public Comment

Chair Carlson announced the public comment section of the meeting.

Don Massucco, representing Ft. Myers Beach, Florida as its Vice Mayor, provided comment on Lake Okeechobee releases. He read a statement into the record. He spoke of the blue-green algae and the red tide and other problems in the water in the area. He asked for assistance from SFWMD and the USACOE in cleaning up the water.

Michael Valiquette, representing Sanibel Planning Commission, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on the water releases from Lake Okeechobee to the estuaries. He was speaking today on behalf of himself and community groups, including PURRE. The

water quality is terrible and he urged the clean-up of the Lake and the estuaries. His group wants to help in the clean-up. Shared adversity is important.

Andrew McElwine, representing the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Naples, Florida, provided comment on the storage and treatment of water from Lake Okeechobee. On behalf of the 6,000 members and 30,000 volunteers welcomed the Committee to the area. His organization voted last night to join PURRE. The impairment in the Caloosahatchee River, drinking water, human and habitat damage were discussed. He provided recommendations to improve the water in the area.

Ralph Wood Ring, representing START Solutions to Prevent Red Tide, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on solutions to avoid Red Tide and the water releases that cause harm to the Tarpon Bay and Lower Pine Island Sound area. He is a native to West Florida and he spoke of the bad water in Tarpon Springs and other areas. Fishing has been terrible. Water quality is getting progressively worse. He is against money being spent on advertising and donations by the SFWMD as he believes the money should be used for restoration efforts.

Eric Lendblad, representing the Purre Water Coalition, Ft. Myers, Florida, provided comment on clean water. The severity and diversity of impacts in the Caloosahatchee River and estuary were discussed. The Caloosahatchee River has been an ignored resource. The PURRE group is very diverse and he verbally listed the types of members. He provided recommendations and requests from the group to improve the water quality.

Sally Tapager, representing the Greater Pine Island Chamber of Commerce, Bokeezia, Florida, provided comment on our estuaries. Three aquatic preserves surround Pine Island and there is a need for clean water. There is an urgency needed to restore the clean water.

Maria Humphrey, representing a delegation from the Town of Ft. Myers Beach, Florida, provided comment on the estuary restoration. She wanted to impress upon the Committee the necessity of cleaning up the water. She read a prepared statement into the record. She provided information on the members of the delegation she represents. The discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River are devastating and are harming their environment and tourism.

Rob Jess, Refuge Manager, J. N. "Ding" Darling Natural Wildlife Refuge, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on the estuary plan and impacts to wilderness areas. The Refuge is suffering from severe damage. He provided recommendations for improving water quality. He asked that everyone become "Pro Active" on this issue.

Kristie Anders, representing herself and the Upper Captiva Civic Association, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on the water quality, quantity, and the effects on the estuaries. She thanked the District for coming to Ft. Myers and presenting information.

She expressed her opinion on the current practices and what she believes are damaging the water. She asked if planting of crops that are more water tolerant could be done. She requested that SFWMD pursue the information from the IFAS study regarding the holding of water.

Barbara Martin, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on the waterway pollution effect on residents and tourism. She is a lifelong resident of Southwest Florida. Tourism was discussed and that needs to be restored. She provided information on rules in Lake Tahoe regarding water management.

Tom Babcock, representing himself, Fort Myers Beach, Florida, provided comment on the Lake Okeechobee Discharges. He provided information on the gradual deterioration to the island. Red Tide does not go away, and algae have caused the beach to be unusable. He asked for protection for the environment in Southwest Florida.

Michael Short, representing himself, Ft. Myers, Florida, provided comment on the releases to the estuary and pollution. He spoke of County Commissioner Ray Judah and his support of improving the environment. Mr. Short does not think that the SFWMD has done enough to stop the continuing deterioration of the estuaries. Water storage was discussed.

Steve Greenstein, Executive Director, representing Sanibel/Captiva Chamber of Commerce, Sanibel, Florida, provided comment on the social and economic impacts of SFWMD's decision on their area. The tourism affects the local economy and tourism has been severely damaged. Water quality must be improved. Their Chamber of Commerce will provide assistance.

Ralf Brookes, representing the Florida Wildlife Fund (FWF) provided comment on the damage that has been done to the estuary. He suggested recommendations to improve water quality. Key biological indicators are needed. The Caloosahatchee River must be restored.

Tamara Pigott, representing the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau (Bureau), Ft. Myers, Florida, provided comment on the management impacts on Lee County's tourism business. Damage from Red Tide and blue-green algae (poor water quality) and the cost of the damage was discussed. This is a very complex issue, but it is important that the SFWMD have information from the Bureau. They want to help.

Barbara Barnes Buchanan, representing the City of Bonita Springs, Florida, pledged the support of the City to finding a solution.

Co-Chair Wade provided information on his previous participation on commissions and committees dedicated to environmental restoration. This WRAC Lake Okeechobee Committee is committed to finding solutions. Background information on ecological mistakes was discussed. 60,000 acres of water storage have been built and other

measures are being used to help with the problems. There has to be a partnership to make efforts work. Mr. Wade represents agriculture on this board. Everyone has to come together to get something done. The Acceler8 projects have started and other things have to be done. The District hears the comments made today and will move forward.

Chair Carlson thanked everyone for attending and providing comments. She asked them stay for the second half of the meeting. She said the suggestions will be taken to heart. Meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m. and reconvened at 2:10 p.m.

7. Water Storage on Public Lands, by Benita Whalen, Director, Okeechobee Service Center, SFWMD.

Ms. Whalen presented information on this item. A copy of her presentation is available from the District Clerk's Office.

Information was provided on alternative water storage/disposal; background information on surface water storage and ASR wells; water retention assessment on the north and south study areas; northern watershed assessment results for water storage on public lands; northern and southern watershed assessment results; World Wildlife Fund Project background information and initiatives; Conservation innovation grant program; watershed current projects; water storage/disposal projects;

Public Comment

Ellen Peterson, representing Save Our Colors, Pahokee, Florida, provided comment on Fisheating Creek.

Captain Bob Pascale, representing the Landings Yacht Club and Landings Fishing Club and the Cape Coral Tarpon Club, Ft. Myers, Florida, provided comment on the bad water conditions in the Caloosahatchee River.

8. WSE Schedule Revision Process Update, LTC Andrew Goetz, Deputy District Chief Engineer for South Florida, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and Kim Odell, Sr. Environmental Scientist, Lake Okeechobee Division, SFWMD

9. 2006 Lake Okeechobee Committee Meeting Schedule, by Rick Smith, WRAC Facilitator, SFWMD.

Adjourn 3:15 p.m.

Alice Carlson, Chair
Water Resources Advisory Commission
Lake Okeechobee Committee

Recorded By:

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